

# New Jersey

## Year in Review



## One-To-One Friendship

# Gigi & Nicole

2019 was an incredible year for Best Buddies in New Jersey with a focus on one word: growth. We hired a new employment consultant, expanded each of our programs and surpassed all event goals, reaching more individuals than ever in the great state of New Jersey! We launched new programs and a brand-new signature event. We grew our Advisory Board with four new engaged leaders.

In April, we held our first ever *Best Buddies Friendship Walk*, with over 300 walkers, families and community members gathering to celebrate friendship. Thanks to our incredible teams, sponsors, individual donors, committee members and volunteers we were able to raise over \$36,000.

Our Best Buddies Friendship program focused on expanding and increasing our impact. Over the course of the year, we supported more than 2,100 individuals in 23 Friendship and Promoter programs at colleges, high schools, middle schools and elementary schools, with 11 new Best Buddies chapters opening in 2019.

In July, New Jersey was represented in a big way at the *Best Buddies Leadership Conference* at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. With 14 student leaders and advisors and five Best Buddies Ambassadors, attending the three-day leadership event, each participant left inspired and ready to make an even bigger impact in their schools and communities.

This year we held our *Third Annual Champion of the Year Gala!* Over the course of 10 weeks, nine incredible Champion candidates, along with their Mission Partners, worked tirelessly and enthusiastically to raise funds for Best Buddies

in New Jersey, bringing in a combined \$226,000. We were excited to crown Rich Sadiv as the grand Champion and present Merck with the Employer Partner of the Year award.

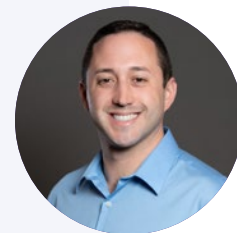
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This summer we launched the Best Buddies Summer Internship Program. We had over 34 employer partners sign on and we provided an amazing compressive paid summer internship in partnership with the NJ Department of Labor to nine outstanding young men and women. We look forward to growing this Best Buddies pilot program in 2020.

On behalf of our Advisory Board and the staff at Best Buddies in New Jersey, I would like to thank you for your support of friendship and inclusion. Because of you and your tireless support, we were able to grow our programs in the Garden State. New Jersey, as a whole, is more inclusive because we were able spread the mission of Best Buddies. Here's to 2020!

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GiGi & Nicole might have met in Kindergarten, but it wasn't until they joined Best Buddies that they became best friends!

They not only attend Best Buddies events together like the bowling night, movie night, Thanksgiving Feast, holiday shopping, holiday parties, game nights and the *Best Buddies Ball*, but they also spend plenty of time together outside of Best Buddies. GiGi & Nicole watch movies together, go out for lunch and this past year, they even participated in the Powder Puff Football Game together!

One of the most striking aspects of their relationship is their willingness to support each other's individual pursuits. Nicole credits GiGi with her success at being her chapter's president this past year and wishes that everyone would know that "you will never find a more loyal friend than a person with disabilities." In fact, GiGi became the team manager when Nicole joined the high school softball team, and one of Nicole's fondest memories is winning the State Sectional Championship and watching GiGi hold the championship trophy up to a cheering crowd.

Her relationship with GiGi and her experience as chapter president has left her "permanently impacted," and she plans to bring Best Buddies with her as she journeys into college. And GiGi's life has been similarly impacted.

GiGi credits Best Buddies with how inclusive her high school experience has been. She believes that her "Best Buddies friends have [her] back," and she's soared to heights she didn't think possible before Best Buddies. In fact, this past year GiGi was crowned homecoming queen of her high school, which she is incredibly proud of. She finally feels "special too," and for all the right reasons this time.

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Nicole & GiGi feel that in the future not only will they be there for each other, but so will Best Buddies! Nicole said it best when she said that she "will forever be grateful to Best Buddies for all the wonderful experiences and for her best friend!"

### One-To-One Friendship

#### Key Program Stats

**Middle Schools**

**4** Total Chapters  
**2** Total Participants

**High Schools**

**10** Total Chapters  
**195** Total Participants

**Colleges**

**4** Total Chapters  
**260** Total Participants

**e-Buddies**

**55** Total Participants

# Integrated Employment Alex



Alex joined Best Buddies when he moved back home to New Jersey from Indiana. He had been working at Amazon in a warehouse and didn't feel he was a contributing employee in his position. "In my past jobs, I never felt I had the support and communication to be successful," Alex explained. Alex began working at Merck through JLL in March of 2019 as an office coordinator in the Facilities Department and looks forward to celebrating his first anniversary in 2020.

Alex began his employment with performing spot checks for potential hazards and helping with any additional needs in his department and now, he performs space audits to separate Merck campuses. He enjoys getting to move throughout the campuses and meet his fellow employees. Everyone knows Alex, people are constantly having conversations with him, especially in the cafeteria. Alex says, "this job gives me the opportunity to be independent. I am able to pay for myself, drive a new car and I am saving up to be able to live on my own. With this job, I have had the pleasure to meet and work with some great people like Carmen and Kara, who I now consider my friends."

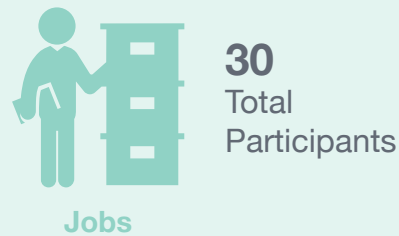
Over the summer, Alex was a crucial piece to the Summer Internship Program that New Jersey kicked off in 2019. We were able to place an intern in Alex's department, where

he took on an important role in providing support for the placement. Carmen, Alex's supervisor at the time, said "Alex took a real leadership role and stepped up to make sure that John's internship was a meaningful one." Due to Alex's success at Merck, doors to employment and internship opportunities have opened for many others throughout the state in other Merck, JLL, and Sodexo locations. Alex's supervisor has said "I think Alex has a bright future and we are going to hear even better stories from him in the years to come."

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– Alex, Best Buddies Jobs Participant

## Integrated Employment Key Program Stats



# Leadership Development John



Hi! My name is John Berardi and I'm a 22-year-old student at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). I've been involved with Best Buddies since 2016, when I joined the TCNJ Chapter, and since then I've become the Buddy Director for my chapter, a State Ambassador for New Jersey and the intern for the Best Buddies state office in New Jersey.

Before Best Buddies I did not have a lot of friendships with other people. I was more shy and quiet. But since joining, I've also joined the Unified Sports Team and the Alpha Phi Omega Fraternity with other Best Buddies members, and through connections I made in Best Buddies, I became the Team Manager for the TCNJ Women's Lacrosse Team and the TCNJ Men's Soccer Team.

Joining Best Buddies, and all of these other organizations at TCNJ, has helped me branch outside of my comfort zone, and become more social and active within my community. This past summer I attended the *Best Buddies Leadership Conference*, and it allowed me access to a whole new world. I loved meeting other members of Best Buddies from across the state of New Jersey and spending quality time with my own chapter members, but the best moment for me was walking into the auditorium on the first night and seeing the whole room full of cheering people, a lot of whom I met and became friends with throughout the rest of the weekend. At *Best Buddies Leadership Conference*,

I also learned more about being an Ambassador, a role that I love and want to continue doing after I graduate. Being an Ambassador to me is like the next level of Best Buddies because you get to speak at events and have fun!

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I also get to attend meetings with our State Director and speak about the impact of having a Best Buddies Jobs program and Internship program.

If there was one thing I learned, and one thing I wish I could have said to my younger self, or other members of this community, it would be this: Do not be afraid to be yourself, and be the best that you can as that person. Try not to worry, just focus on your goals!

– John, Best Buddies Ambassador

## Leadership Development Key Program Stats

